

PROJECT CODE RED

Improving fire suppression capacity in rural Alaska communities

Overview

Alaska Village Initiatives (AVI) developed Project Code Red in collaboration with the State of Alaska, federal and private funders, and other organizations to improve fire suppression capacity in rural Alaska communities.

Between 2001 and 2011, AVI delivered specialized fire equipment to 138 Alaskan communities, and 900 rural volunteer firefighters were trained by the State of Alaska, Division of Fire and Life Safety under the program.

In 2011, AVI, the State of Alaska and several funding partners commissioned a retrospective evaluation of Project Code Red to study its effectiveness in addressing fire protection needs, identify areas for improvement in the current program, and assess implications for future equipment and training deployment. Over the course of nine months, independent consultant Alaska Summit Enterprise, Inc., conducted 85 interviews and collected 49 surveys from program participants and partners, and completed historical research on the program's implementation.



**The evaluation defined
“success as using
Project Code Red
equipment and
training to prevent
and suppress fires.”**



Major Findings

■ Equipment and initial training was valued by participants.

Overall, participants indicated that they were “very pleased” with the program and 89.4 percent indicated that the Project Code Red (PCR) equipment met some or all of their community fire protection needs. The program and equipment raised overall awareness, provided a training forum and served as back-up to other firefighting equipment.

■ Additional training is the #1 need of 73% of PCR communities.

Participants indicated the lack of access to regular refresher training has slowly eroded PCR's effectiveness, especially in the more isolated Interior and Western Alaska locations.

■ Community commitment, training offerings and presence of fire departments were linked.

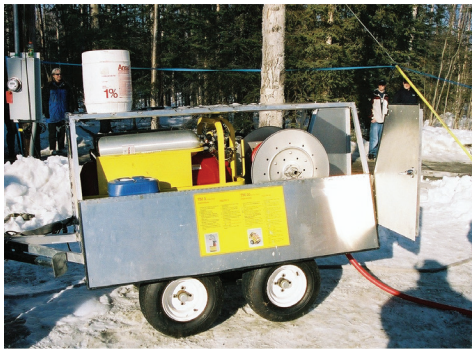
Fire departments with trained firefighters were more likely to engage in fire prevention activities and foster community commitment. However, participants indicated it was difficult to keep trained fire department volunteers.

■ Program management needs re-envisioning.

Organizational structures, funding levels and priorities have shifted since the program was first conceived. The absence of a long-term strategic vision has limited program effectiveness over time.

For more information and to obtain a copy of the full evaluation:

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Paths Forward

The evaluation offered a series of potential steps in improving PCR and addressing rural fire protection. More detailed information is available in the full evaluation report. Highlights are:

Project Management

- Design and institute a five-year strategic plan for Project Code Red;
- Develop dashboard for regular program monitoring of the program, develop benchmarks of success and implement tracking system for participating communities;
- Capitalize on the effective partnerships that were developed under program implementation and define project management roles between existing partners.

Training

- Develop a training plan to bring existing PCR fire departments up to standards set by the State or by a peer group;
- Implement a regional instructional pool and networking system to reduce costs of initial and recurrent training.

Community Commitment

- Develop a needs assessment tool to identify current community fire protection needs and determine whether necessary resources are available to support proposed fire protection;
- Enhance and expand efforts to target young people to become firefighter volunteers and improve fire safety knowledge;
- Develop an incentive program for rural firefighters to enhance and encourage community commitment and volunteer retention.

Equipment

- Analyze new technologies to determine if they might be better alternatives to existing equipment;
- Research renewable energy alternatives to reduce the cost of heating and providing electrical power to equipment;

This evaluation was supported by funding from:

Rasmuson Foundation
 Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.
 State of Alaska Fire Marshal's Office - Division of Fire and Life Safety
 Denali Commission

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